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"BEN"

BY
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TORONTO, CANADA

Written after hearing the story told in a lecture
by FRED G. BALE

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"BEN"

"Judge, here's a boy that must be sent
To jail to get hard punishment.
He asked my husband if he might
Sleep in our coalshed, judge, at night,
My husband let him come, weak man—
Refuse a boy he never can.
The boy slept there a week. To-day
The coalshed roof he tore away.
He had no reason. It is sad
That any boy could be so bad.
Send him to jail; he should not be
At large destroying property.

The boy's sad face was firmly set;
No justice did he hope to get,
No kindly sympathy to find;
Life had been hard and men unkind.
He waited doggedly to hear
An unjust sentence, most severe,
But kindled at the judge's tone—
The kindest he had ever known.
"Now tell your story, son," said he;
"Don't be afraid, my boy, of me."

Then fearlessly the newsboy told
His story. "Jedge, I'm ten years old.
My mudder died a week ago,
And I am lonely, jedge. You know
She had been sick three months, and say,
I worked so hard to try to pay
For medicines and doctor, too;



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And it was all that I could do
To pay for them, and rent, and food,
But mudder she was kind and good;
She thanked me so for what I did,
And prayed for me—her only kid.
'Twas easy, after all, to do
The best I could for her. I knew
She could not live, and so I tried
To keep her happy till she died.
One little flower I bought, for she
Had very often talked to me
About her mudder's garden flowers
She loved so well. She'd sit for hours
And look at it and sweetly smile;
And sometimes smoothe my hair awhile.
I kept it near her bed so she
His one red flower could always see."

"Well, jedge, you see, the landlord said,
'Kid, you must go,' when she was dead.
He took our fixin's for the rent,
And turned me out, so, jedge, I went
And asked her husband if I might
Sleep in his coalshed ev'ry night,
'Twas a decent sort to me,
'Twas like a prince he seemed to be;
He bought his papers ev'ry day
From me, and when he came to pay
He took no change, and so I went
To him. I wished to pay no rent,
I thought if I the rent could save
I'd put a stone at mother's grave.
He let me in. The dame was cross;
She talked like she was used to boss,

But he stood pat, and said he'd be
A friend, a true, kind friend to me.
He said he 'loved all boys, for he
Had lost his own'; so, judge, you see
I love two men—jest him and you,
No other men but jest you two
Have seemed to care about a boy,
Or help to give a fellow joy.
Well, judge, I kept the flower, but I
Soon found that it began to die.
There was no light, iedje, in the shed;
I knew that it would soon be dead
Unless it got some light, and so
I took o.e board off. Now you know
The story, judge. I could not let
That flower die. 'Twas mother's yet."

A change came in the woman's heart.
"Oh, judge!" she said, "I'll do my part
And try to be a mother true
And give a home to him, if you
Will let me keep him, and if he
Is willing my own boy to be.
I had a baby of my own;
He died, and I had selfish grown.
I hated boys because mine died,
And locked my heart in stubborn pride,
Till even love embittered me.
But with his 'love of mother' key
This boy unlocked it, and I know
'Twill shut no more. My love will grow
For him; he'll fill my baby's place."
She clasped the boy in fond embrace,
And then a flood of loving tears
Washed out the stains of selfish years.

